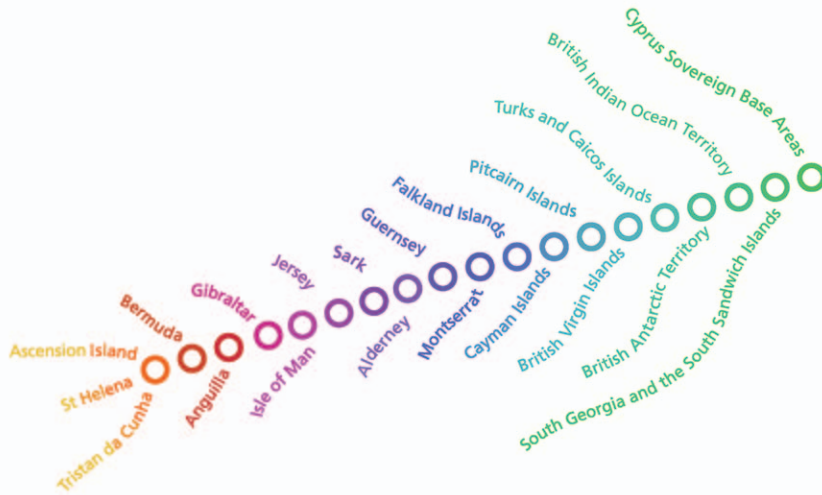


Sustaining Partnerships: a conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities

Gibraltar
11th to 15th July 2015



Sustaining Partnerships international environmental conference in Gibraltar

On 11th July 2015, conservation workers, scientific researchers, representatives of civil society environmental groups and governments environment departments from across the UK Overseas Territories met in Gibraltar for a 5-day gathering. The purpose was to exchange best practice, discuss successes, explore innovations and forge partnerships with the overall aim to ensure that the wildlife, and the ecosystems of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies is secured for future generations by the people. Over 90% of the global biodiversity for which the UK has responsibility under international agreements depends on these territories and their ecosystems are vital too for services to humans.

The conference was organised by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and the Government of Gibraltar, with support from the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society. Seventeen UK territories were represented, several up to ministerial level, as well as nine other countries, with over 100 participants.

Blue iguanas, mountain chickens (a threatened frog species), spiky yellow woodlice, sea turtles, gigantic whales and millions of albatross all have homes in the UKOTs. Many are not found anywhere else on Earth. Each UKOT has a set of unique challenges but they all share some similarities – for example, small human populations, often remote locations, many are low-lying islands, and small land areas. This means that many of them face the same pressures for example, the enormous pressures caused by climate change and sea-level rise, unsustainable development, and alien species introduced by humans.

Safeguarding the natural environment is as important for the services this provides to people as for habitats for this vulnerable and unique wildlife. Sharing of knowledge is a powerful tool and, since the first of this series of working meetings to be organised (also in Gibraltar, in 2000), several initiatives and projects have been launched. These include: invasive species removals, scientific surveys and research, economic evaluation projects in several UKOTs, pilot work on tourism to protect wildlife, increased support from UK institutions and UK Parliament and input into EU funding policy.





From left: Dr Mike Pienkowski (Honorary Executive Director, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum), The Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia (Deputy Chief Minister, HM Government of Gibraltar), The Hon Dr John Cortés MBE MP CBiol CEnv (Minister for Health, the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, HM Government of Gibraltar) and some of the other conference participants at the Opening in the gardens of the Garrison Library

The conference followed on from earlier meetings in Gibraltar in 2000, Bermuda in 2003, Jersey in 2006 and Cayman in 2009.

UKOTCF’s Chairman, Liz Charter of the Isle of Man, said “I must thank Her Majesty’s Government of Gibraltar for hosting and financing the 2015 conference, alongside UKOTCF’s own contribution. In addition to this prime resourcing, we acknowledge and thank Defra for support for some of the preparatory work, JNCC for supporting many of the participating UKOT government officers, and Jo Treweek of Treweek Environmental Consultants for donating her expertise in the EIA workshop. Our partners, the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society have played a major part in the conference. We are particularly grateful to all participants for coming and participating so actively, especially in giving papers. Their presence is the reward for us organisers.



The conference participants



From right: Liz Charter (UKOTCF Chairman), Hon Dr John Cortés (Minister for Health, the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, HM Government of Gibraltar) and Dr Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF Honorary Executive Director) with some of the other participants in view at the start of first plenary working session.

“We are honoured that, in addition to our host, Hon. Dr John Cortés, Gibraltar’s Minister of Health, Environment and Climate Change, the conference has enjoyed throughout the equally lively presence of Hon. Claude Hogan, Monserrat’s Minister of Agriculture & Environment and Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, States of Alderney. We are grateful too to have the presence, on the final report-back day, my own Minister, Hon. Richard Ronan, Minister for the Environment, Food and Agriculture from the Isle of Man, and Hon. Kedrick Pickering, the British Virgin Island’s Deputy Premier & Minister for Natural Resources & Labour. Thank you for joining the conference.”

Minister Dr John Cortés MBE said in his opening address: “Gibraltar is 3rd in the world GDP per capita. We are investing 1.1 billion in a development on eastern side of the rock on existing reclaimed land”.

“Despite economic growth, despite almost zero unemployment, we are not negatively impacting the environment in any significant way. As Minister for the Environment, I have not had to lose much sleep over what we are doing in developing and in making the strides that we are making economically.”

“During all this time that we have had this continuing economic growth, we for example, increased the size of our protected areas. We have expanded the Upper Rock Nature Reserve to include lower areas. What is now the Gibraltar Nature Reserve covers most of non-urban areas of Gibraltar. We have declared a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation, both under EU law, on the Upper Rock. We have legislated marine protection and introduced marine protection regulations. For the first time, we are monitoring and enforcing these type of laws. Last week, we published a command paper to review the Town Planning Act, which will mean that all Government projects have to go through independent planning commission before they get approved.”

“All these things we are doing, yet we are thriving as an economy, so the environment and the economy are not necessarily in conflict. They can work together, provided you know how to do it, and I think here in Gibraltar we are learning quite fast”.

“In order to be able to advance the environmental agenda we need the support of the people. When you do things like change a dirty car park in to a brand new grassy public park, people clearly come on your side”.

“This is the type of meeting which is not just a talking shop. We must make sure that we take things away with us and that we make things happen. We have make sure that we all progress on our way to sustainability and carbon neutrality, which is possible in small territories such as ours; that we develop ways in which we restore and protect natural areas and that increase our knowledge of what our natural environment is. We have to take a message to a wider audience and not keep it within ourselves in our territories. Make our small territories real examples of good environmental governance”.



The Ministerial meeting. Front row from left:

Hon Richard Ronan, Minister for the Environment, Food and Agriculture, Isle of Man

Hon Dr John Cortes, Minister for the Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar

Hon Fabian Picardo QC, Chief Minister, Gibraltar

Hon Kedrick D Pickering MD, Deputy Premier & Minister for Natural Resources & Labour, British Virgin Islands

Hon Claude Hogan, Minister of Agriculture & Environment, Montserrat

Back row from left:

Mr Henry Wilson, Acting Director, Department of Environment & Maritime Affairs, Turks & Caicos Islands

Mr Richard Lole, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture, Isle of Man

Mr Jim Kerr, UK Adviser, Government Tristan da Cunha

Mr Steve Butler, on behalf of MLA Michael Poole, Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Falkland Islands

Mr Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, States of Alderney

(Participating by Skype: Hon Wayne Panton, MLA, Minister of Financial Services, Commerce & Environment, Cayman Islands)

The use of remote sensing, apps and citizen science to monitor and carry out survey work; the use of native nurseries and coral restorations to save species from extinction; the use of satellites for surveillance of illegal fishing; the importance of environmental economics and putting a price on nature and how to manage fisheries sustainably: these are just some of the concepts which were discussed and shared. Some of the novel ways in which Gibraltar is dealing with its challenges to its unique biodiversity and environment were at the forefront on what was discussed. The full proceedings of the conference will be available at www.ukotcf.org in due course.

These discussions have enabled participants to find new ways of working and enable them to learn from others on how to approach various challenges, which are experienced in similar situations across all the UKOTs and CDs.

A Ministerial meeting, opened by Gibraltar's Chief Minister, Hon. Fabian Picardo QC, and hosted by Minister Cortés, was held immediately following the conference and included several other Ministers or their representatives from the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. The Ministers recognised the strength of working together and will now aim to hold similar meetings annually.

In summing up some of the main points of the conference for the Ministers' meeting, Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF's Honorary Executive Director, said "In UKOTCF, we are continually checking what the territories want us to do, and trying to learn all the time. This includes too improving each conference. UKOTCF works only for the UKOTs & CDs – we do not have another agenda. Long-term working relationships, understanding the differences between UKOTs and CDs and with UK, and mutual confidences are all part of this. Unlike other UK-based bodies, you are not a small part of our business; you are our business. But that makes us vulnerable because we do not have other activities or income streams to buffer hard times, and we welcome your kind offers of help in this regard."

He noted that, during the conference, UKOTCF had been asked by territory participants to undertake no fewer than 25 wide-ranging tasks. "We looked forward to providing the help requested, subject to securing from granting bodies the modest resources necessary to allow the largely voluntary efforts of UKOTCF to be deployed. We are so grateful to territories for offering to host and fund future conferences – this is a major boost, and we hope that UK Government will fulfil its commitments and help out too."

Some of the immediate points from the conference summarised are appended.

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Notes

The UK Overseas Territories are part of the UK's sovereign territory, and their citizens are British citizens. The 16 UK Overseas Territories are: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and the Turks & Caicos Islands in the Caribbean; Bermuda in the North Atlantic; Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Falkland Islands, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, and British Antarctic Territory in the South Atlantic; British Indian Ocean Territory; Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific; and Gibraltar and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas in Europe. UKOTCF works closely also with the Crown Dependencies (the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark). Like the UKOTs, they are territories of the British Crown, but not represented in the UK Parliament nor funded through the British domestic budget.

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) exists to promote the coordinated conservation of the diverse and increasingly threatened plant and animal species and natural habitats of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs). It does this by providing assistance in the form of expertise, information, practical help and liaison between non-governmental organisations and governments, both in the UK and in the Territories themselves. It brings together as its member and associate organisations conservation bodies in the UKOTs and in Britain, and has a wider network of mainly volunteer specialists.

Some of the immediate provisional conference outputs summarises for the Ministers' meeting the following day:

Multilateral Environmental Agreements / Environment Charters

MEAs are an important part of transparent and accountable governance, demonstrating the territories' environmental credentials. The conference offered encouragement and support to all territories considering having further MEAs extended to them.

It is recommended that the UK & UKOT/CD Governments promote the value of the Environmental Charters especially in relation to the MEAs and continue to monitor progress, using both these and the CBD's Aichi targets.

Arlene Brock, distinguished former Ombudsman for Bermuda, pointed out the legally binding nature of Environmental Charters, confirmed in Supreme Courts. The UKOTs and UK Government committed to the Charters in 2001 and again in 2012. UKOT Ministers, while recognising the commitments of their own governments under the Environment Charters (agreed with the UK Government in 2001) – and indeed under MEAs even where there is no Charter – should continue to press the UK Government to fulfil its commitments under the Charters, including in relation to:

- Technical assistance, especially regarding technical and scientific issues like renewable energy, [fulfilling Commitments numbers 1, 5 and especially 7]
- Assistance with updating environmental legislation, [fulfilling Commitments 2 and 5]
- A ring-fenced fund to support “projects of lasting benefit to the Territories’ environments”(Commitment 8).

The conference decided to urge the Ministers of the UKOTs to rely on the Charters when seeking the support they need for environmental work, some of which are Legal commitments.

For example, for *Environmental Impact Assessments* (EIA), UKOT governments should

1. Require EIA for all major development proposals and for those proposals likely to have significant environmental impact
2. Put in place appropriate and effective legislation requiring EIAs that meet accepted best practice standards
3. Develop follow-up and enforcement mechanisms and allocate the resources needed.
4. Ensure that the EIA process is embedded in/ informs the planning/ development consent process.
5. Make provision for open and independent scrutiny and review.

To enable this, UKOT Governments should have:

- Appropriate supporting policy and legislation in place regarding required outcomes for ecosystems, habitats and species
- State of the environment reporting or strategic baseline data in place so developers, planners and EIA practitioners are aware of issues they will have to address to comply with this
- Assistance and Capacity building from UK Government in line with Charter commitments to develop strategic sustainable development plans and devise effective impact assessment processes commensurate with significant threats and pressures.

During the sessions, we had some excellent examples of the use of public participation to aid decision-making. We also heard of examples of disastrous results when the public were not consulted. We therefore recommend that informed public participation by interested and affected parties be central to all decision-making in the Territories.

Environmental Education and Public Awareness Session

Attempts should be made to integrate Environmental Education topics into the National Curricula at all levels.

UK Government needs urgently to end its 5-year exclusion (in conflict with its international commitments) from funding support of environment education and awareness in UKOTs; we recognise that consultants are expensive – the NGOs, like UKOTCF doing this work with local partners, are good value for money.

Invasive Species / Marine Protected Areas etc

Invasive alien species are a serious threat to biodiversity, especially to highly vulnerable endemic species on

these small islands. NGOs can play an important and efficient role in the control of invasive species, which is resource intensive. Partnerships are essential in many situations but governments need to take a lead role, especially in preventing the arrival of new invasive species.

The importance of identifying and consulting all stakeholders (local and regional) in all relevant processes, such as dealing with invasives, MPA planning, etc.

Renewable Energy

For those territories who have committed to energy transition, ensuring the right legislative framework is in place is key; knowledge sharing and support is critical.

There is a need to focus on the long-term energy transition process whilst identifying also the quick win opportunities, e.g. LED street lighting, energy efficiency in government buildings, solar on schools, hospital retrofits.

Share knowledge/practice, planning and resource requirements between territories.

Capacity and resource issues

By international agreement, it will soon be necessary to include biodiversity and ecosystem services in national accounting systems to ensure biodiversity is fully valued for the long term benefit of the territories.

Economic values of environmental assets must be incorporated into the decision-making process in order to ensure sustainability in development.

The conference learnt with dismay of question-mark over the future of Darwin Plus, at the same time pointing out the ambiguities of the process and an increased need for equitable and fair distribution of funds

Environmental education & awareness should be restored to eligibility for grant-funding by UK Government.

Stakeholder Stewardship

Governments generally assume the role of steward, but private and public sector interests absorb the benefits from environmental sustainability. Some aspects of stewardship roles can be shifted from the public to the private sector by incentivising good behaviour (green certifications, etc.). We heard from some examples in Turks & Caicos. UKOTCF has been involved in exploring this with local partners and we would all like to be able to do more.

Legislative Framework

The Cayman Islands' National Conservation Law provides a framework that other UKOTs can use to build similar legislation. Conservation legislation and Planning must be integrated, so all are on the same page. Stakeholder participation and transparency should be mandated in legislation.